# Interview Summary

**Interview:** **Lt. Timothy Eason**
**Time/Date:** **December 15, 2004**
**Location:** **Air Station Kodiak**
**Present:** **Commander Karl Baldessari, Scott Erickson**

During the interview, Lt. Eason provided the following information:

Lt. Eason was the flying pilot of CG6513, based on the Coast Guard Cutter ALEX HALEY. He was also the aircraft commander, and was seated in the right seat. Lt. Kornexl was the copilot, seated in the left seat. The flight mechanic/hoist operator was AMT Gregory Gibbons. He stated that on the afternoon of the accident, his crew did not launch from the ALEX HALEY. The launch limits for the ALEX HALEY's helideck is 7 degrees of pitch, 6 degrees of roll, and 40 knots of wind. CG6020 and CG6021 performed hoisting operations from the Selendang Ayu, after the vessel deployed its starboard anchor. The weather conditions at the time were 25 to 35 foot seas, 40 to 45 knots of wind, with gusts to 55 knots, and snow squalls.

After CG6020 completed the hoisting operation and departed for Dutch Harbor, CG6021 remained in the area and orbited. Lt. Eason said he spent some time on the bridge of the ALEX HALEY, and was able to overhear some of the radio traffic between the cutter and the Selendang Ayu. The executive officer (X/O) of the ALEX HALEY was trying to convince the master of the vessel to leave the ship during daylight hours while CG6021 was available. The X/O offered to take the master of the vessel back to the ship if necessary. Lt. Eason commented that he didn't think that the ALEX HALEY had direction from Coast Guard District command to order the evacuation of the vessel.

Lt. Eason recalled that the radio conversations between the ALEX HALEY and the master of the Selendang Ayu included a confusing statement by the master who said that the anchor was holding, and he needed eight personnel to repair the engine, after earlier stating that no engine repairs could be made.

After CG6021 departed the area, the ALEX HALEY staff and the crew of CG6513 discussed steps for possible contingencies. These included trying to maneuver the ALEX HALEY out of the heavy weather conditions into Makushin Bay, and get CG6513 out onto the helideck in anticipation of evacuation needs. They also discussed putting eight survival suits on board the Selendang Ayu and trying to get 4 vessel crewmembers off. These 4 could be then transferred to CG6020 when it returned from Dutch Harbor. The crew of CG6513 then went to lunch.

During lunch, the crew of CG6513 was told by the ALEX HALEY operations staff that the starboard anchor of the Selendang Ayu had given way, and the vessel was aground. The cutter staff asked if the crew of CG6513 could launch, and the answer was, "yes." The helicopter was rolled out onto the helideck, the blades were unfolded, and the helicopter was started. Lt. Eason waited until the ALEX

HALEY momentarily stabilized, and he lifted off at 1759, 37 minutes from the request to get airborne. Once airborne, he heard CG6020 inbound to the area. He discussed the hoisting options with CG6020, and they decided that CG6020 had a larger cabin capacity, and the crew was familiar with the deck hazards. CG6020 moved into position to hoist, and CG6513 took up a high hover position, about 200 feet, and about 200 yards aft of CG6020, which was a 7 to 8 o'clock position behind CG6020.

The bow of the vessel was in the breaking surf zone. The sea condition was 30 foot swells with breaking waves. The wind was about 45 knots, with occasional gusts of 55 to 60 knots. The visibility in snow squalls included 10 minutes of 1/8 mile visibility, and then 2 to 3 minutes of 2 to 3 miles of visibility. CG6020 began hoisting about 1805 to 1808, and the crew of CG6513 observed the operation.

As CG6020 finished their 7th hoist, Lt. Eason observed the helicopter move back and away from the left side of the ship and appeared to be well above the deck area, although he did not think the helicopter was above the tops of the boom masts. He thought CG6020 was about 60 feet above the water. He observed a vertical explosion of water against the bow of the vessel that appeared to be 80 to 100 feet high, higher than the light mast on the fo'c'sle of the vessel. The wave enveloped CG6020, and it appeared to him as similar to putting an HH-60 helicopter through a car wash. Prior to the accident, at no point in time did he see contact between the helicopter and the vessel. Lt. Eason said the saw CG6020 descending as it emerged from the wave spray. The nose of the helicopter yawed slightly left and the tail rotor, or perhaps the stabilizer, struck the railing of the vessel. The vertical tail pylon broke off. The helicopter yawed slightly to the right, and the main rotor blades hit the vessel. He saw a segment of main rotor blade fly by his position.

The water impact of CG6020 appeared to be gentle, and produced a big splash. Lt. Eason then saw the bottom of CG6020 as it was floating nose down. His crew immediately went into rescue mode, and did not complete rescue checklist Part 1 and Part 2. The crew spotted 5 targets in the water. They did not know who they were, and only thought of them as targets. The flight mechanic immediately rigged the rescue basket and within 4 minutes had the first target in the helicopter. Lt. Eason said he did not know who was being hoisted, but during the 4th hoist, the flight mechanic reported that the person in the water made a one small movement. The flight mechanic conned the helicopter left and right, trying to scoop the person into the rescue basket. The person became fouled in either the cable or the basket, and was partially out of the basket. The flight mechanic stated, "he will not get in, and I cannot get him off." Lt. Eason hovered the helicopter downward to about 100 feet, and the basket was raised anyway. Lt. Eason said that the survivor had the hoist cable around his neck, with part of his butt on the edge of the basket, and was thought to be dead. Once the survivor was in the helicopter cabin, he took several breaths.

The crew of CG6513 hovered around the crash scene. They observed floating debris from CG6020, but saw no other targets in the water. They learned that the rescue swimmer from CG6020, and the master of the vessel were still on the

Selendang Ayu, and were relatively safe. Lt. Eason initially thought about putting the last survivor on board the ALEX HALEY, but the helideck was still out of limits for landing. They proceeded to Dutch Harbor with the copilot flying. The crew pulled maximum power into a 45 knot headwind, at 300 feet. The light conditions were now nighttime and the weather were instrument meteorological conditions. The copilot was initially not utilizing night vision goggles, but the crew located a set, and he went on the goggles. They arrived in Dutch Harbor about 1915. They transferred the survivor to an ambulance and refueled. They were airborne again at 1948 in near zero/zero conditions.

The flight crew was flying on night vision goggles, and while en route back to the scene, they learned that the vessel had broken in half. The rescue swimmer and the master of the vessel were on the forward, unlit half of the vessel. When they arrived back at the Selendang Ayu, the visibility was about 5 miles. The crew located the rescue swimmer and the master near the starboard side of the bow, against the fo'c'sle. Lt. Eason decided to maintain a high hover, around 200 feet, and made several attempts to place the rescue basket near the rescue swimmer, but due to the high wind conditions, the basket trailed far aft of the helicopter. He said he started to get momentary vertigo. The copilot took the controls and attempted to place the basket near the rescue swimmer, but was unsuccessful. They contacted the rescue swimmer and told him that he needed to move aft so the helicopter pilots could maintain a hoisting reference position, and be clear of any deck hazards.

The rescue swimmer and the master move aft to near the third cargo hold hatch. The copilot developed momentary vertigo, and Lt. Eason took the controls. He said he lifted his night vision goggles and was able to get a better visual reference in the helicopter's hoist lights. Several attempts were made over an hour time period. The helicopter was hovering over the port side of the vessel, and the rescue basket was trailing over to the starboard side of the vessel. The crew was finally able to hoist the master of the vessel from about a 175 foot hover. The basket was sent down to the rescue swimmer. When the cable reached the deck of the vessel, the flight mechanic commented that he saw "white" on the cable. Lt. Eason explained that the rescue cable is 245 feet long. The last 10 feet of cable is marked with an alternating white and red pattern. The comment from the flight mechanic meant that there was about 235 feet of deployed cable.

When the rescue swimmer was hoisted into the CG6513, the cabin door was closed. Lt. Eason said that the crew was almost overwhelmed by the odor of oil and fuel vapor. The crew of CG6513 conducted a shoreline search in good visibility conditions, about 1 mile either side of the Selendang Ayu. CG6020 was no longer visible in the water. During their second sweep of the beach, they encountered another snow squall, and had to turn off their landing lights to diminish the reflection from the snow. CG6513 returned to Dutch Harbor about 2148, having flown about 3.9 hours for the day.

Lt Eason reported that he has been in the Coast Guard for 13 years. He received his Coast Guard flight wings in June, 1999, and has accrued about 2,000 hours,

with about 1,700 in HH-65 aircraft. He as been assigned to Kodiak since June, 2003, which is his third deployment in Alaska.